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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0510

Nov. 16, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush,

With less than three months before elections in Iraq, the job of stabilizing that country and transferring meaningful sovereignty to its people is far from a foregone conclusion. I just returned from meetings with our NATO partners in Europe and am convinced that the most we can expect from them in Iraq is training for the Iraq Security Forces and funding. It is imperative that you obtain this assistance immediately; redouble U.S. efforts with the Arab League who have a stake in the stability of the region; and get the United Nations to provide the capability to support the elections and create a strong independent judiciary in Iraq. Finally, it is vital that you give the American people a realistic appraisal of the situation on the ground in Iraq, the challenges ahead, the additional costs that they will be asked to bear, and your plan to succeed. Until we recognize the dire situation we are in, with the United States bearing the lion's share of the financial and human costs of stabilizing Iraq and rapidly burning through our military and financial resources, and take a set of new steps, it is unlikely that the American people will keep supporting the mission in Iraq.

In a July 21, 2003 document drafted by the then Coalition Provisional Authority, the four 'core foundations' of the administration's strategy for Iraq were listed as establishing security, essential services, the economy, and governance. The continuing insurgency in some of Iraq's most populated regions threatens all of these objectives.

After 18 months of rule by the Coalition Provisional Authority and four months of Iraqi sovereignty, reconstruction efforts continue to stagnate with only \$1.2 billion of the \$18 billion earmarked for reconstruction having been spent and a good portion of that redirected for security. The interim Iraqi government is closely identified with the United States and is still unable to assert its authority and provide services throughout critical areas of the country.

The cost of the war to the U.S. in treasure – close to \$180 billion - and in blood – over 1100 U.S. deaths and over 8000 casualties as well as tens of thousand of dead Iraqis - is staggering. Finally, America's reputation in the region has suffered a significant freefall as a result of our presence as an occupying force. Our presence is transforming feelings in the Muslim world from simple opposition to American policies, to a more generalized dislike of Americans. The security of the United States is more immediately threatened

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the longer a U.S. presence in Iraq provides a focal point for Muslim resentment and a training ground for terrorists.

To meet these challenges and succeed in Iraq, several urgent steps must be taken:

1) Set out Clear Objectives in Iraq and a Strategy to Achieve Them

Over a year and a half after the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, it is vital that we sustain the American people's support for the war and encourage broader participation from the international community in stabilizing and rebuilding Iraq.

a) Domestic

With conflicting benchmarks and statements from U.S. officials about what outcomes are acceptable in Iraq, an insurgency raging, and the burden of the war still borne almost exclusively by the U.S. taxpayer, we need to set a course and explain our plan for restoring sovereignty to Iraq. Addressing a joint session of Congress and explaining to the American people what their sacrifices have and will achieve is necessary to prevent an erosion of support for the war as we get into decisive and possibly protracted battles with the insurgents in the coming months.

b) International

Despite previous disagreements in the run-up to war, it is crucial that the international community help Iraq achieve stability. The United Nations has failed so far to live up to its tradition of assisting countries emerging from conflict. The Secretary General has made unfortunate comments about the offensive against Fallujah and the UN has refused to help Iraqis establish a war crimes tribunal.

I urge you to convene an international conference on Iraq as soon as possible to develop a consensus on roles, responsibilities and assistance from the international community. The main product of the conference would be the creation of an Iraq Contact Group, which would provide oversight and resources to the Iraqi government until full sovereignty is achieved through elections in 2005. A contact group exists for Afghanistan and such a body would serve as an important mechanism to sustain international attention on Iraq, follow up on financial commitments and actual disbursement of funds pledged by the international community and assist Iraq with any and all challenges that it will encounter during its political transition.

It is worth emphasizing that the January 28 elections, while important, are not the end of the political transition process. According to the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) approved by the Iraqi Governing Council on March 8, 2004, the 275 member National Assembly selected in January 2005 will choose a transitional government. The transitional government is to draft a constitution by August 15, 2005 that will be put to a vote in October. If the Constitution is approved, elections to a permanent government are to occur by December 15, 2005. Sustained support from the international community is crucial every step of the way so that the Coalition's massive investment to date in the future of Iraq is not frittered away.

2) Stabilize Iraq

In the short term:

a) Aggressively extend security to areas not under Iraqi Governing Council's control.

While we should not postpone the January elections, it is imperative that large pockets of the country not be left out of the political process because of continuing lawlessness. The insurgency will not be defeated by military force alone and a greater premium will have to be placed on winning the hearts and minds in the long run. Of particular concern is the Sunni Triangle, home to roughly 20% of the country's population where anti-US sentiment runs high. But in the few months before the election, it is vital that the United States, with the help of Iraqi units that are ready, retake population centers under the control of insurgents. Holding an election where a large portion of the Iraqi people are disenfranchised because they cannot get to the polls, will divide the burgeoning Iraqi political system, weaken governance, and only encourage insurgents.

In the long term:

b) Expand the Coalition:

We need to stem the tide of defections from the "coalition of the willing" and build a true "coalition of the capable." As you know, on top of previous defections from Spain, Honduras, the Dominican Republic and Poland, Hungary recently announced that it will leave after the end of March. The Czechs intend to pull out by the end of February and the Dutch by the end of March. Other nations are under pressure to withdraw. Achieving a stronger coalition will mean a new set of diplomatic overtures to countries with large Muslim populations like Indonesia and Pakistan, organizations like the Arab League, and NATO to get them to provide troops and money.

c) Accelerate the training of the Iraqi Army

The current objective according to the Pentagon is to train an Iraqi Army by April 2005 that will be 27,000 strong or some 8% of the pre-war Iraqi force. That number is too low and we have only trained some 4,500 Iraqi troops so far. Some 42,000 Iraqi police are trained and ready but their loyalty has been suspect and more work is needed in this area. NATO, for instance, has only participated in Iraq since August with a small training mission of 70 people. That force must be increased to allow accelerated training of an indigenous Iraqi police and military that can take over from the coalition.

d) Increase the size of the U.S. military

As you know, the 108th Congress passed legislation to increase the size of the Army and Marines. This increase is welcome but may be insufficient. Indeed, the mandated Army increase of 30,000 active duty personnel and the additional 9,000 Marines will only occur over three years. The strain on the military is showing. A third of active duty personnel is currently deployed in over 100 countries across the globe. Forty percent of Operation

Iraqi Freedom is made up of guard and reservists often deployed for back-to-back rotations because they represent so-called high demand low density skills. With growing casualties in Iraq and an increasingly unpredictable mission, recruitment is becoming a serious problem. Increasing end-strength needs to start now because we cannot foresee events and future challenges to U.S. military power and because increasing the size of the military takes time. It will allow the services to meet the long-term challenge of stabilizing Iraq and future missions should more foreign troops not be forthcoming. It will also take the pressure off the guard and reserve and let them go back to growing the economy and protecting the homeland, and give the military a larger pool of individuals with critical skills.

3) Complete the Search for Weapons of Mass Destruction

I urge you to invite the United Nations weapons inspectors to assist the Iraq Survey Group in completing the search for possible weapons of mass destruction. Given the startling information uncovered by the IAEA and the emphasis you placed on the IAEA in your nonproliferation speech at the National Defense University on February 11, I urge you to give the United Nations weapons inspectors a greater role in the search for Iraqi WMD.

I believe that inviting them to supplement the efforts of the Survey Group would both add credibility to the final results of the search and add experience to the U.S. team. It would also help coordinate a greater international response to help track down and control material that may be proliferating out of Iraq. Furthermore, given the degraded security situation in Iraq, this would be another opportunity to share more tasks with foreign partners who are willing to accept some of the risks.

4) Fully investigate the Oil-For-Food Program

The alleged corruption in the UN's Oil for Food Program being examined by former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, is a troubling indictment of the way aid for that country has been misused in the past. It is both vital that we understand how Saddam Hussein was able to take advantage of that program, and for you to encourage reform in whatever areas are necessary to ensure that funds going through the U.N. are used effectively to aid countries in transition.

5) Budget for military operations in Iraq in the annual defense budget

It is vitally important that the costs of military operations in Iraq be included in the regular defense budget rather than through supplemental funding requests. The costs of training and equipping new troops are largely predictable. Including these costs in the regular defense budget would put an end to the current fiscally irresponsible pattern that allows the Secretary of Defense to run up massive debt for future generations. Supplemental spending has allowed the Pentagon to avoid hard choices in the defense budget. In previous major conflicts like Vietnam, spending was budgeted through the regular authorization and appropriation process. There is no excuse for pursuing this irresponsible approach and there is every reason to reign in the bloated defense budget.

6) Improve the Economy

The decision to disband the Iraqi Army was a major strategic mistake that increased the population of unemployed and disaffected Iraqis. The broader consequences of overthrowing a statist regime that employed a large portion of Iraqis were not planned for. Unemployment threatens the stability of Iraq and more must be done to meet the expectations of the Iraqi people. Greater efforts must be undertaken to employ demobilized soldiers. Ambassador Negroponte should work with Iraqis to ensure that greater responsibility is given to Iraqis to manage U.S. reconstruction funds.

7) Fully Equip our Troops

Despite some progress, it is not clear that U.S. troops in the field in Iraq are getting the equipment and protective gear they need. Last December, the Commander of Combined Joint Task Force Seven, Army Lt. General Ricardo S. Sanchez wrote a letter to senior Army leadership stating that his supply of equipment was so poor that he would not be able to sustain combat operations "with rates this low." He specifically identified important systems with low readiness rates such as the M1 and Q-36/37 Radars as well as problems with fielding Interceptor Body Armor. Recently, it was reported that soldiers from the 343rd Quartermaster Company failed to report to duty for a convoy mission across central Iraq. The soldiers are said to have been concerned about the safety of their trucks and the lack of an aviation escort. The trucks may have been missing parts and armor. While the latter problem appears to have been resolved, there is persistent evidence of shortages that need to be addressed immediately.

Looking Ahead

As Coalition and Iraqi forces pursue a major offensive against insurgent-held territory in the Sunni Triangle this month, it is important to remember a simple adage of war, that the political will must always match the military means. The first offensive against Fallujah failed because the Marines were given changing objectives and mixed signals about support for their mission. Now, all elements of power seem to be aligned in the right direction. Likewise, for all the recommendations I have made above, capabilities and willpower must match the mission. None of these proposals will be easy to implement and many will require sustained political and diplomatic effort. But, all are necessary and, if implemented, will improve the Coalition's chances of success in Iraq. The stakes are high but a stable Iraq is a vital U.S. interest. Failure in Iraq will leave behind a failed state and a breeding ground for terror.

I look forward to your timely response to these recommendations.

Sincerely,



Ellen O. Tauscher
Member of Congress